# California Regional Water Quality Control Board

# **Los Angeles Region**

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Los Angeles Regional Water Quality Control Board
Minutes of February 28, 2002 Regular Board Meeting held at
City of Simi Valley Council Chambers
2929 Tapo Canyon Road, Simi Valley

#### **INTRODUCTION**

1. The meeting was called to order by Chairman Nahai at 9:07 a.m.

## **Board Members Present**

Julie Buckner-Levy, Susan Cloke, Francine Diamond, R. Keith McDonald, Robert Miller, Bradley Mindlin, H. David Nahai, Christopher Pak, and Timothy Shaheen

## **Board Members Absent**

None

Winston H. Hickox

Secretary for

Environmental
Protection

## Staff Present

Dennis Dickerson, Debbie Smith, David Bacharowski, Wendy Phillips, Ronji Harris, Laura Gallardo, Robert Sams, Michael Lauffer, Jonathon Bishop, Jenny Newman, Jack Price, Paula Rasmussen, Beverly Barbour, Kwang-il Lee, Wen Yang, Gary Schultz, Carey Wilder, Russ Colby, Elizabeth Erickson, Tracy Woods, Hugh Marley, Lala Kabadain, Peter Raftery, Blythe Ponek-Bacharowski, Rodney Nelson, Thanhloan Nguyen

#### Others Present

Louise Rishoff, District Director, representing
Assemblymember Fran Pavley
Drew Bohan, Santa Barbara Channel Keeper
Vicki Clark, EDC
Ted Cartee, representing Ventura County
Supervisor John Flynn
Ronald Sheets, Ojai Velley Sanitation District
Douglas Breeze, City of Port Hueneme
Carry J. Miller, City of Los Angeles
Barry Berggrun, City of Los Angeles
Jaigy Bramble, Las Virgenes MWD
Sally Coleman, Ventura County Flood Control
District
Jeffery Dintzer, Gibson, Dunn, and Crutcher
Linda Kaplan, Surfside III Residents

Barbara Hamrick, California Department of Health Services Daniel Cooper, Lawyers for Clean Water John Haack, Halaco Arthur Fine, Halaco

Dave Gable, Halaco
Steve Fleischli, Santa Monica Baykeeper
Dom Davis, City of Santa Monica
Emilia Jacalone, Legalink
Mati Waiya, Wishtoyo Foundation
Andy Prokopow, Ventura County
Environmental Coalition
Teresa Jordan, Simi Valley Resident
Shahrouzeh Saneie, City of Los Angeles

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Don Nelson, City of Thousand Oaks Mark Pumford, City of Oxnard Heather Lamberson, LA County Sanitation Districts Adel Hagerkhalil, City of Los Angeles Jean Garrett, Santa Monica Bay Audubon Society Matt Liao, Caltrans – LA
Richard Bradley, City of Ventura
Vicki Musgrove, City of Ventura
Daryl Wagar, City of Ventura
Charles Bragg Jr. Santa Monica Bay
Audubon Society

Debbie Pharm, City of Los Angeles

## Pledge of Allegiance

1. Roll Call

A roll call was taken.

2. Order of Agenda.

The Executive Officer, Dennis Dickerson recommended the following changes to the Agenda.

- Item 7.1 will be heard at a future meeting
- The Halaco Cease and Desist Order is being continued from the February 19<sup>th</sup> meeting. The item will be head prior to the Thousand Oaks ACL.
- 3. Approval of Minutes

There was a motion to approve the minutes

<u>MOTION</u>: By Board Member Cloke, seconded by Chairperson Diamond and approved on a voice vote. No votes in opposition.

4. Board Member Communications and Ex Parte Disclosure.

No Board Members had anything to communicate or disclose.

5. Public Forum

Jim Colbaugh, Las Virgenes MWD, expressed appreciation for the State grant for water recycling programs and discussed plans to expand treatment plants. He added that he was glad the TMDL would be coming out before their permit renewal and suggested a constructed wetland to help with nutrient reduction. He added that Las Virgenes would need the Board's permission in order to operate the wetland.

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#### 6. Uncontested Items

There was a motion to approve the uncontested items.

<u>MOTION</u>: By Chairperson Diamond, seconded Board Member Nahai, and approved on a voice vote. No votes in opposition.

# Continuation of the February 19, 2002 Halaco Cease and Desist Order

Board Members R. Keith McDonald, Bradley Mindlin, Christopher Pak and Timothy Shaheen, excused themselves from this item as they were not present for the February 19 meeting.

Ventura County Supervisor John Flynn, spoke first and urged the Board to issue a truly effective CDO. He commended the Board for directing staff to revise the February 19 document, but added that he felt today's document was not effective either.

Board Member Cloke asked Supervisor Flynn to address the general regulatory approval process for permits issued to Halaco. She then asked what was the ultimate goal of the Board of Supervisors was for the waste management unit.

Mr. Flynn replied that the Board had not yet taken a position but that he personally believed the waste pile should be removed.

Chairperson Diamond asked if Supervisor Flynn's staff had read the CDO and if they felt it was still unenforceable.

Ted Cartee, Supervisor Flynn's staff, replied that he felt there were at lest three major faults with the document that would make it difficult to administer.

Louise Rishoff, District Director, representing Assemblymember Fran Pavley, read a letter from Ms. Pavley, stating that it appears the EDC's concerns were still not met by the CDO and urging the Board to take the strongest action possible.

Michael Lauffer, Staff Council, reviewed the issues the Board members brought up at the February 19<sup>th</sup> meeting and how staff, Halaco, and EDC had resolved or not resolved these issues. He reiterated the tools, such as a formal adjudicative process, still available to the Board, but added that he would like to resolve the matter informally.

Art Fine, Halaco, updated the Board on the filter press progress and the results of sampling done so far. He addressed EDC's objections to the CDO. He stated that they had eliminated the "apparent" language in the findings, replacing it with "facts contested by Halaco." He added that he felt the CDO meets all Water Code requirements and addresses all the Board's concerns.

Drew Bohan, Santa Barbara Channelkeeper, stated that there was very little substantial improvement over the NTCDO from the February 19<sup>th</sup> meeting and urged the board to

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reject this current CDO. He added that he understood that the Board requested findings without disclaimers at the February 19<sup>th</sup> meeting and that Paragraph 16 was weak and not a finding.

Vicki Clark, EDC reported that she felt the Board directed staff to remove the qualifying language from the findings and to limit the force majeure clause at the last meeting and that these issues were not addressed. She also stated that the "it is hereby ordered" paragraph improperly makes it seem as though Halaco is in compliance with 80-58 if the TSO is adopted. She added that Paragraph M apparently does not require the removal of the WMU until 25 years, while there are many ways to remove the pile more quickly.

Daniel Cooper, representing Channelkeeper, still felt the CDO was largely unenforceable and inconsistent with CDOs issued to other dischargers, adding that if the Board approved the CDO, they would be rewarding Halaco's abuse of the litigative process.

Dennis Dickerson, Executive Officer, responded to comments, stating that although this was not an average CDO, it was enforceable and did not modify of 80-58. Mr. Dickerson spoke with the City of Oxnard and learned that Halaco was on the right path and would be getting their permit to discharge the liquid waste that had been through the filter press soon. He stated that the new CDO was much more defined and specific and would get more work done in the near future. He then addressed the individual comments of EDC and Channel keeper.

#### **Board Questions**

Chairperson Diamond asked Michael Lauffer how the context of the language stating that Halaco does not accept the findings affect the Board's ability to implement the CDO. She also asked about Finding 23, the "it is hereby ordered" language on page 12, and the elimination of the 4-month time schedule under M-2.

Mr. Lauffer replied that the important part of the CDO is the provisions, which are enforceable regardless of the language in the findings and that all enforcement tools are still available to the Board. He added that Finding 23 does not erode the provisions of the CDO and that the language eliminated on page 12 was redundant. He stated that the 4-month schedule was ambiguous regarding the type of material to be removed and that the requirement for direction from the executive officer was consistent with other applicable regulations.

Board Member Cloke asked Mr. Dickerson asked how the 40-foot WMU would be reduced to 25 feet at the rate specified in the time schedule. She also asked if the intention of the CDO was to create several different scenarios for removal of the WMU, including the backup plan of closing the site.

Mr. Dickerson replied that the pile was not even all the way across and the proposal called for the reconfiguration of the pile, for which a work plan is due by

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December 31, 2002. He added that there was language ensuring that Halaco consult with Department of Health, Radiological Board and the Air Pollution Control District. He stated that it was the intention that the WMU be removed but that it was impossible to predict how much would be useable so the alternative scenario would be to close the site, ensuring that it did not affect groundwater.

Board member Cloke had an additional question regarding the V channel and if staff had a map, drawing, or some idea how it would work.

Mr. Dickerson replied that the V-ditch was specific to the east berm and was intended to address possible impacts on the adjacent property.

Board Member Cloke asked Mr. Lauffer why the "may not" language was not removed on page 7.

Mr. Lauffer replied that this was the one place where he felt the language should be left in because it reflects the benchmarks established in the General Industrial Permit, where an exceedance of these benchmarks indicates an inefficient storm water pollution prevention plan.

Board Member Cloke also asked that if this CDO is approved, then it was agreed to by all parties that no one would appeal.

Mr. Lauffer replied that this was true but that Halaco still had the right to petition.

Board Member Cloke reported that she appreciated the changes made to the CDO but was still concerned that the reference to regulatory delays in the force majeure clause assumes that they are a reasonably anticipated problem. She asked why the Board would want to give the authority to the executive officer.

Mr. Lauffer replied that this was the most contested language in the negotiations and if the board didn't feel comfortable with it then they should agree to go to a formal hearing because this was the deal breaker. He added that the extension granted due to third party delays was no longer automatic, that the executive officer could evaluate the circumstances and determine if it was a reasonable delay. He added that he felt it was a good approach.

Board Member Nahai had several questions and comments regarding the proposed CDO. The following are the remaining changes he wished to make to specific findings and provisions after staff answered his questions:

- Page 7, last 3 lines of 1<sup>st</sup> full paragraph should not have been struck.
- Paragraph 16, last sentence should be changed to, "no scientifically definitive conclusion has been made at this time."

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- Paragraph 22, the word "limited" should be stricken as well as the words "and in recognition that." He added that he thought paragraph 23 should have covered the contested language throughout.
- Page 12, in the "it is hereby ordered" paragraph, the words "based on the foregoing findings," should be deleted, as they are nothing but disagreements by Halaco.
- Regarding the temporary storage of the WMU, delete the words, "consistent with directives issued" and replace it with, "as directed in writing by."
- Section M-2, regarding the time schedule, asked if Halaco was unable to move 100 cubic yards when the whole pile is 430,000 cubic yards, how could they intend to remove the whole pile in 25 years.

Board Member Cloke reiterated that the section creates alternative scenarios for the WMU removal, and that the language needs to be tightened to clarify that the removal of the pile is the ultimate goal.

- Page 20, Section 4, concerned that the time period between the work plan development and approval would automatically extend the period for implementation because the permittee might submit a defective work plan.
- Page 20, 6<sup>th</sup> paragraph, change "require" formal hearing to "request" formal hearing.
- Page 21, 2<sup>nd</sup> paragraph, insert the words "up to" before "3 months" in the force majeure clause. Board Member Nahai added that it should be clear that 3 month extension for one event and the 5 month extension for two or more events would not be cumulative.
- Board Member Nahai also suggested that the executive officer's ability to grant extensions due to regulatory delays stop after 6 months, and the matter would go before the Board at that point.

The Board took a short recess and then broke for lunch so that staff and Halaco could discuss the proposed changes.

Mr. Lauffer reported that Halaco agreed to most of the changes including three main issues. The words "up to" were stricken from the force majeure clause, language was added to section M to make it clear that the goal was to eliminate the WMU in 10 years and the amounts required to be removed per year were increased. The final issue was that of Halaco's contentions to the findings. Halaco agreed to remove their objections

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from all of the findings if they got to insert a short paragraph before paragraph 23 explaining their objections to the findings.

Board Member Nahai stated that he felt the extra paragraph was unnecessary and that Halaco's contentions were covered in paragraph 23. The Board members agreed that they would not adopt the permit with the extra paragraph.

There was some discussion about section M and whether it was clear that it was Halaco's goal to remove the WMU rather than close it. The Board members agreed upon language that made Halaco's goals clear.

M. Lauffer proposed a language insert for paragraph 23 that stated Halaco's objections to the findings without adding an extra paragraph.

There was a motion to adopt the CDO with the changes read into the record by Board Member Nahai and later by Michael Lauffer.

<u>MOTION</u>: By Board Member Nahai, seconded by Board Member Cloke and approved on a voice vote. No votes in opposition.

Board Members R. Keith McDonald, Bradley Mindlin, Christopher Pak and Timothy Shaheen, returned to the meeting. The Board Members agreed to postpone the information items to a future meeting.

10. Consideration of a tentative resolution authorizing the EO to approve a SEP list

Dennis Dickerson gave a correction to 10.1-4 under the 3<sup>rd</sup> project. The cost is \$104,525 instead of \$14,000.

Board Member Nahai asked that additional consideration be given to projects helping cities having trouble complying with storm water regulations.

<u>MOTION</u>: By Chairperson Diamond, seconded by Board Member Miller, and approved on a voice vote. No votes in opposition.

9. Consideration of Complaint No. 01-120 against the City of Thousand Oaks

Jeffrey Dintzer, representing the City of Thousand Oaks, spoke first, stating that he wanted to make sure the City had full time to present their case. He put into the record the City's letter of February 11 regarding the time available. He also stated that the ACL dated January 3, 2002 was not faxed to his offices until February 26, 2002 and that Item #9, the slides presented by staff, included a revised ACL to Santa Catalina that was not provided to the City.

#### Staff Presentation

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Wendy Phillips, Acting Assistant Executive Officer, presented the background on the spill and the determination of the penalty amount. She stated that staff considered the location of the spill; the cause, which both the City and staff agree was operator error; the notification and response of the City, which staff felt was adequate; the volume of the spill; public health risks; and the City's compliance history. Staff based its estimation of the volume of the spill on initial estimations by the City of 15,000 to 30,000 gallons. The presence of paper products in the creek also indicated a high flow. Ms. Phillips stated that the estimated penalty of \$7.50 per gallon was warranted due to the nature and circumstances of the spill. These include the fact that it was a dry weather spill, it impacted beneficial uses such as hiking, it presented a public health risk, and it impacted a small stream with little assimilative capacity. At \$7.50 per gallon, the maximum available liability for a 30,000-gallon spill is \$238,490. She stated that staff was recommending they only asses penalties for a one day spill instead of a possible 9 day spill. The 9 days would be based on the time elapsed between the operator error and the report on August 21 via e-mail from Frank Dikken, the hiker who first noticed the spill. She added that the city presented no evidence of financial hardship. She then reviewed other ACLs issued by the Board for sewage spills and compared the penalties assessed.

#### Discharger Presentation and Board Questions

Jeffrey Dintzer, stated that the penalty was unprecedented in terms of the price per gallon and the percentage of the maximum penalty available. He added that he felt much of what staff presented was irrelevant, that this was the first time a spill was caused by human error, that there was no evidence that the spill was 30,000 gallons, that there was no connection to the toxicity of the discharge, and that staff used unproven historical violations to determine penalty amount. He then said that the penalty is punitive because it is unprecedented and was issued at the same time the City was appealing the \$2.3 million dollar fine issued for a previous spill.

Mr Dintzer called Peter Raftery, an engineering geologist on Regional Board staff who inspected the spill and asked him about his inspection, photos, the amount of paper he saw in the creek, and his memo to staff.

Eric Aider, representing the City of Thousand Oaks, questioned Mel Henson, Municipal Service Center Superintendent, City of Thousand Oaks, about the Unit W lines, the circumstances leading up to the spill, and the City's response. The spill was caused by operator error when a valve was left partially open. He stated that the spill was originally reported by Emil Norby, who is no longer an employee of the city, and who could not attend the meeting.

The Board Members asked Mr. Aider to limit his questions to topics disputed by staff and to not use Henson's testimony about the spill response since he was not there.

Mr. Dintzer replied that the staff should not be allowed to use Mr. Dikken's e-mail (the hiker who first reported the spill) to establish the date of he spill since it was hearsay.

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Krista Hernandez, representing the City of Thousand Oaks, questioned Jim Mabry about his inspection of the site on August 16, 5 days before the spill was reported on the 21<sup>st</sup>. Mr. Mayberry stated that he noticed nothing odd, and that there was no debris around or water flowing from the manhole.

Mr Mayberry then answered some questions from the Board, reporting that the place where he walked across the creek was about 600 ft from the site of the spill, that the top of the manhole was about 6 feet from the 10" pipe where the leak occurred, and that it was a 10 inch gravity flow line.

Michael Mitchell, the City inspector who visited the site after the spill, was questioned next. He stated that the spill could have been no more than 3,000 gallons because there was no erosion of the area below the spill

Chairperson Diamond asked when the overflow would begin after the valve was turned in error.

Mr. Mitchell replied that the flow would build up over time, but that the overflow couldn't have occurred before the inspection by Mr. Maybry on August 16<sup>th</sup>.

Board Member Nahai asked why Mr. Norby overestimated the spill when he first reported it.

Mr. Dintzer referred the Board to Mr. Norby's declaration that after learning additional information, such as the inspection by Mr. Maybry on August 16, he realized that the spill could not have been as large as 15,000 to 30,000 gallons.

Mr. Mitchell answered questions from Mr. Dickerson regarding the pressure buildup required to blow out the manhole cone. Mr. Mitchell reported that the cone had not blown out but the cement used to hold it together had fallen out, which happens all the time. He then stated that he didn't know how many buckets were used to clean up the spill or if any photos were taken.

Mr. Dintzer then questioned Mr. Dickerson about how the ACL amount was determined, how the spill was estimated, and if Mr. Dickerson believed the spill was the cause of the elevated coliform counts.

Mr. Dintzer then submitted evidence found attached to an ACL that his staff found while reviewing records at the Regional Board office. The note attached to the ACL referred to an amended ACL and suggested that elevated coliform levels could be due to a storm drain outfall located above the spill site. The note also referred to 4 days of violations.

Robert Sams, Staff Council, stated that this was a working draft and not part of the public record, and staff would therefore invoke the deliberative process.

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Mr. Dintzer then compared the ACL issued to Thousand Oaks to ACLs issued to other POTWs. He stated that for far worse violations, these POTWs were given much lower penalties on a price per gallon basis.

Mr. Dintzer then questioned Donald Nelson, Director of Public Works. Mr. Nelson reported that the sign posting after the spill was policy for all spills and should not be used as evidence of a health risk. He added that this was the first spill caused by operator error in the City of Thousand Oaks. Mr. Nelson then stated that Dennis Dickerson had visited his office after the spill and said that if the City of Thousand Oaks would back off of their appeal to the \$2.3 million fine for a 1998 spill, then the Board would ease up on this penalty.

The Board Members stated that they didn't believe Mr. Dickerson would make such comments to Mr. Nelson.

Board Member McDonald asked some questions of Mr. Nelson about the capacity of the plant, the flow rate into the plant, and how spills were calculated.

Mr. Nelson stated that the plant takes in about 12 million gallons a day. He added that spill estimation could not be based on flow rate into the plant because the flow rates wary so much that they would never be able to identify such a small event.

Board Member Mindlin asked Mr. Nelson about the velocity of fluid going through the pipe that caused the spill.

Mr. Nelson estimated that it was faster than 5 lineal feet per minute.

Board Member Nahai asked who decided to hire Gibson, Dunn & Crutcher. He then asked if Mr. Nelson knew the court order regarding the \$2.3 million dollar fine only referred the amount of the fine back to the Board and did not question the City's liability.

Mr. Nelson replied that it was the city council's decision to hire the attorneys and that he couldn't say for sure why the court referred the fine back to the Board.

The Board members discussed the estimation of the spill and the magnitude of a spill that could be gauged by sensors.

#### Public Speakers

Daniel Cooper, Lawyers for Clean Water, spoke on behalf of Baykeeper, stating that he was here to support staff's calculation of the penalty. He added that he believed there was an overall problem of municipal POTWs hiring lawyers instead of paying penalties for spills and that they were abusing the litigative process.

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#### **Questions for Staff**

The Board asked the author of the letter attached to the ACL referenced by Mr. Dintzer to address the nature of the letter.

Russ Colby, Staff Enforcement Unit, stated that the letter was intended as a draft. He stated that the reference to 4 days of violations in the letter was a mistake. He thought staff needed to show quantitative impacts per day above 200 mg/L in order to assess penalties per day, as is the case in North Carolina law, where he used to work. He was corrected by his supervisor and made the changes to the final ACL. He added that the background levels of coliform were a problem in the creek and could be due to the storm drain above the spill, but not at levels as high as those recorded after the spill. He disputed the City's claim that a 30,000-gallon spill would have shown up in creek flow records. He stated that the creek had a flow rate of 2.8 million gallons a day and would not show a 30,000-gallon spill.

Mr. Dintzer asked Mr. Colby why when he realized he was thinking of North Carolina procedures when he wrote the memo, he did not go back and correct the number of days of non-compliance.

Mr. Colby replied that it went to the benefit of the discharger.

Chariperson Diamond asked Mr. Colby to review the standards for coliform, which are lower than the level of 16,000 mpn/mL detected after the spill.

Mr. Dickerson replied to some of the City's earlier comments. He said he did not ignore the follow up estimation of spill estimates. He then added that the purpose of his meeting with Mr. Nelson was a courtesy visit, as he was already in the building on another matter, and that he did not tell Mr. Nelson to back off on the appeal of the \$2.3 million fine.

Board Member Mindlin asked if the City and the Board could agree on the number of gallons spilled.

Mr. Dickerson replied that staff could accept Mr. Norby's original low-end estimate of 15,000 gallons.

Mr, Dintzer replied that he had no problem with 15,000 gallons, that his bigger problem was with the price per gallon of the penalty.

Chairperson Diamond asked Ms. Phiilps how staff came up with the total gallons spilled and price per gallon estimated.

Ms. Phillips replied that the 30,000-gallon estimate was a conservative estimate made by the city, and that the \$7.50 price per gallon was reasonable when

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considered in light of other dry weather overflows, previous violations, and the impacts to a small stream with little assimilative capacity. She added that it was typical to use evidence submitted by the discharger because hey are closest to the spill. She stated that staff did not take the approach of sending a 13267 letter because they were trying to be pragmatic.

Board Member Mindlin asked why staff was using a top down approach to estimating the penalty rather than their usual bottom up approach.

Ms. Phillips replied that it was difficult to put a number on the economic benefit to the discharger in this case, which is one of the tools in the bottom up approach.

Chairperson Diamond asked Michel Lauffer what the Board was required to do to estimate total gallons.

Mr. Lauffer replied that the Board did not need absolute proof but that they had to evaluate the weight of the evidence and show reasonable inferences.

#### **Board Discussion**

Board Member Nahai stated that he tended to add more weight to the estimates of the first inspector and submitted that the Board accept the minimum 15,000 gallon spill estimate. He added that although the Board has advised staff to increase fines, especially in the case of an avoidable spill, \$7.50 a gallon might be too high of a leap.

Chiarperson Diamond agreed. She added that she felt that the presence of the hiker indicated a public health risk and warranted a higher fine.

Board Member miller suggested accepting a spill estimate of 20,000 gallons, which is in the range of the first inspectors estimates and coincides with Mr. Nelson's estimate that the flow through the pipe was about 10 lineal feet per minute with a height differential of 200 feet.

The Board then discussed the appropriate price per gallon penalty and agreed to a \$5 per gallon penalty for a 20,000-gallon spill including staff cost.

<u>MOTION</u>: By Chairperson Diamond, seconded by Nahai, and approved on a voice vote. Board Member Mindlin voted in opposition.

Mr. Dintzer made an offer of 15,000 gallons at \$4 per gallon to the Board and said that Mr. Nelson would recommend that the City of Thousand Oaks agree to pay the fine and not appeal.

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There was a motion to cancel the first motion and accept the offer, including a fine of \$4 per gallon for 15,000 gallons, plus \$10,000 for one day of violation, and staff costs at \$10,990, totaling \$80,990.

<u>MOTION</u>: By Board Member Mindlin, seconded by Board Member Miller, and approved on a voice vote. No votes in opposition.

# Adjournment of Current Meeting

The meeting adjourned at 7:12 p.m. The next regular meeting is scheduled for March 28, 2002, at The Metropolitan Water District of Southern California, 700 North Alameda Street, Los Angeles, California, at 9:00 a.m.

Minutes adopted at thesubmitted/amended.	Regular Board meeting
Written and submitted by:	

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